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The matter I have to present came to me largely fortuitously. My own interests lay in matters linguistic, and my immediate object was to obtain knowledge and specimens of the local languages. These languages are, of course, unwritten.

My principal method in such cases has been to get the people to tell me current popular tales and legends, and to give me accounts of local customs and beliefs, and to write them down to their dictation.

The content of my language material may therefore present subject of interest to folklorists, but it has not been collected with the critical knowledge or care of an expert folklorist.

Material thus casually collected is bound to present contradictions, ambiguities, and possibly misunderstandings, when it is not set in the firm frame of a story.

In regard to the terrain with which we are concerned, it is enough to recall that it is situated in the extreme north of India, to the north-west of Kashmir, in one of the loftiest mountain tracts of the world: the meeting point of the Hindu Kush and Karakoram ranges, where peaks and even ranges of 20,000 feet are a commonplace. The physical features are such as to favour isolation, a condition difficult of attainment in a continental country. Access for foreign influences must always have been difficult and restricted.

Even in recent times with the advent of the Pax Britannica, the partial establishment of foreign administration, and the construction of traversable roads, there has been no overwhelming inflow of exogenous influences, only a gradual infiltration. Thus old-standing beliefs and customs have not been subjected to any violent assault by modern disintegrating forces.

Isolation, however, is never more than relative.

In the case of Gilgit, at some unknown time, probably not more than 500 or 600 years ago, Islam gained admittance and sooner or later became the sole recognized religion in the region. Islam is a whole cultural system in itself,

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providing everything from popular tales and domestic ritual upwards, and its effects on the outlook of any uncultured people must be immense.

Again a new period of foreign influence opened in the nineteenth century, first with the incursions of the Dogra rulers of Kashmir, resulting in partial occupation and administration, and later, in 1892, by the establishment of British general control in the rest of the country.

There are three principal languages in use in the Gilgit area: Burushaski, Shina and Khowar. Burushaski is the language of the people of Hunza Nagir, and a dialect of it is spoken by the inhabitants of Yasin. Shina is the language of the majority, current, in various dialects, over the greater part of the Gilgit Agency, as well as in Darel and Tangir to the south. It is an Aryan language. Khowar is also of that stock and is the language of Chitral. It is spoken in the western districts of Gilgit, Ghizer, and part of Kuh, and as a secondary language in Yasin.

How far there are to-day any definite ethnical distinctions in the population corresponding to these different languages is an open question. There has certainly been considerable mingling through intermarriage and individual migration, but there are at present insufficient data for solving the ethnological problems of the Gilgit region. When in Gilgit I secured anthropometric measurements of some 600 men from the various districts, and it is possible that if these are ever worked out by some competent anthropologist they may afford grounds for intelligent guessing.

The material of which I am going to make use reached me chiefly through the medium of Shina: that is, it represents the beliefs of the Shin and Yashkun speakers of Shina. To a lesser extent I shall be able to refer to corresponding beliefs existing among the Burushaski speakers of Hunza and Nagir. It is significant that the names of several of the principal supernatural actors are different in the two languages, for this means that even if the two linguistic communities derive

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● 121 197 771 171 from a common racial source these supernatural beings have been long enough in the possession of each to acquire independent existence in its language. This of course probably represents an inversion of the facts. It is safer on the whole to assume independent origins and gradual assimilation through contact and social fusion.

197 563 174 It appears to me not an impossible theory that of the two great sections into which the Shina-speaking population is divided, the socially inferior Yashkuns represent the earlier population who probably shared the language and culture of the surviving Burushaski-speaking peoples, while the Shins were an invading and conquering race who imposed on the Yashkuns their language and probably took over from them some of their beliefs.

[582] The Khowar in the western districts is due probably to the extension of the Chitrali population beyond the political and natural borders of Chitral, reinforced by intermarriage which goes on at the present day, and in part to political domination in the past, which in quite recent times amounted to actual rule. Punial and Yasin are still governed by members of the Khushwakht family of Chitral whose mother tongue is Khowar.

128 In order to facilitate the arrangement and handling of the material with which we have to deal, it is necessary to adopt some system of classification of the Supernatural. I am not in a position to offer any scientific scheme, but a very rough grouping will suffice to serve our needs.

From one point of view we may regard the Supernatural as represented :—

1. By Animate Beings possessing certain supernatural powers or qualities, e.g. demons, witches, etc.

2. By Qualities or Virtues pertaining to, or affecting inanimate objects, exhibited in magical or irrational processes and properties.

With the latter category, comprising examples of sympathetic and contagious magic, the working of the evil

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Festivals and Folklore of Gilgit.

By GHULAM MUHAMMAD, *Chief Clerk in the Political Office, Gilgit.*

[Read July 5th, 1905.]

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INTRODUCTION.

121 114 In introducing the folklore and old customs of Gilgit, I may mention that great difficulty was experienced in collecting the material in a country which possesses no written record of any sort. I had to go from village to village and from house to house to gain information from anybody. After four years of incessant labour I collected some notes about the folklore, old customs, administration, tribes, games and past history of the country. The former two subjects, being of special interest, are now dealt with through the medium of this Society: the others will be published later in book form.

101 181 The inhabitants always call their valley by the name of "Gilit," not Gilgit. The word Gilit is probably the corrupted form of a Sanskrit word "Girit," which means a mountainous place.

This secluded valley, which was half a century ago unknown, has now, owing to the recent disturbances in Hunza, Nagir, Chilas and Chitral, become so well known to the world that it requires here merely a brief description for readers to form an idea as to its position and character.

Gilgit is situated 218 miles (sixteen stages) to the north-west of Srinagar, at an elevation of about 4,400 feet above sea level. During summer the thermometer rises to 115° and during winter falls to 15°. It is surrounded on the north by the small States of Hunza and Nagir, on the west by Punial and Yasin, on the south by Chilas and Kashmir, and on the east by Skardu. The district extends along the Astor, Indus and Gilgit rivers

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PREFACE.

DURING the last six years it has been my good fortune to visit a number of countries on both sides of the eastern portion of the Hindoo Koosh range of mountains, all of which are very little known, and some of which have never before been visited by any European. In 1873 I formed one of Sir D. Forsyth's mission to Kashghar, and in the spring of the following year crossed the Pamir and visited Sirikol and Wakhan. In 1876 I visited Gilgit, Hunza, and part of Yassin, and in 1877 was appointed by the Indian Government to reside at Gilgit in a political capacity. In 1878 I visited Yassin and Chitral, and was only prevented by the outbreak of hostilities with Cabul from prolonging my journey.

In the following notes I have endeavoured, to the best of my ability, to record all that I have deemed worthy of general interest regarding the countries and their inhabitants, without going over ground already trodden by more competent observers. In some places I have found it necessary for the preservation of the unity of the subject to repeat what has already been written by Mr. Shaw, Mr. Drew, Dr. Leitner, and others; but where possible, I have purposely avoided doing so. The sketches given of countries I have not personally visited, as in the case of the countries described in the first chapter, are compiled from the accounts of natives of the

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121 countries in question, or, as in the account of the Siah Posh tribes, from the accounts of persons who have visited their country; the last two years having brought me in contact with great numbers of both classes. But I should explain that what I have written regarding caste observances, habits, customs, and religious ceremonies, should, as a rule,—except, of course, where I make special reference to particular places,—be understood to be chiefly the habits and observances of Gilgit and its immediate neighbourhood, as this is naturally the part of the country with which I am best acquainted.

000 On the other hand, though I have visited Sirikol and Wakhan, whose peoples would properly come within the scope of a treatise on the Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh, I have avoided making special mention of them, because I can add little or nothing to what has already been published about them.

Apart from political considerations, the countries about which I write, possess much of great ethnological interest, and recent events make it probable that opportunities for further and better organised enquiry will soon be afforded. I shall therefore be satisfied if the information I have gathered is found, by persons more competent than myself to make scientific use of it, to throw light on what has already been made public.

I would deprecate the application of a severe scientific criticism to my endeavours to give an insight into some of the languages and their grammatical constructions. The difficulty of attaining to an accurate knowledge of a language, when one can only learn it from illiterate peasants through very poorly-educated interpreters, can be easily understood.

The plates have been elaborated by my friend Captain H. H. Cole, R.E., from rough sketches of my own.

The spelling of some of the names in the text will be found to differ from that used in the survey map.